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March 17, 2009

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Mr. Gene L. Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I am writing to ask the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) Forensic Audits and Special Investigations Unit (FSI) to initiate an investigation into the practice of purchasing prescription medications through online consultation services.

With the advent of the Internet, many consumers have turned to the convenience of the Internet for purchasing their prescription drugs. Although many practitioners and pharmacies dispense prescription drugs through legitimate means, some entities exploit gaps in the legal system and prescribe medications with little or no information on the patient.

Previous GAO work clearly demonstrates the potential dangers to consumers who purchase drugs over the Internet. For example, GAO successfully purchased highly addictive prescription drugs without a prescription, received prescription drugs from unapproved foreign pharmacies, and received counterfeit prescription drugs. More recently, GAO was able to easily purchase anabolic steroids over the Internet without a prescription and determined that most of the steroids purchased over the Internet are shipped from foreign sources.

It has come to our attention that an emerging area of great concern is the use of online consultation services. Allegations have surfaced that individuals can now easily obtain controlled substances and other prescription medications without establishing a legally required doctor-patient relationship—circumstances which could pose significant risks to consumers as well as create secondary markets for the sale of prescription medications. Specifically, we would

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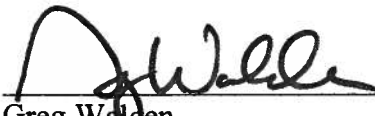
like FSI to demonstrate through proactive testing and other investigative techniques the ease with which consumers are able to obtain prescriptions or purchase drugs using these online consultations. In addition, we would like FSI to determine if the practitioners and/or the companies providing these services are doing so in compliance with Federal law.

Thank you for your assistance with this matter. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Alan Slobodin with the Committee Minority staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,



Joe Barton
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Greg Walden
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

cc: The Honorable Henry A. Waxman, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Bart Stupak, Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations